He Gave His Name to Famous Fir . . .

DID BULLET OR BUFF

IT'S A LONG WAY from Briar Cottage on the Perth road in Scone, Scotland, to the mauka section of the land of Laupahoehoe; but in between is a story as Scottish as tartan, reading at times like Fenimore Cooper, with just a touch of Robinson Crusoe. A story that ends with Pono Beamer's son, "Towhead," wrestling a jeep 6,000 feet up the side of a volcano to take a Victoria business man to the spot where a Botany Bay convict committed a murder.

To get the whole thing in proper perspective you have to drop back 150 years to the village of Scone and a ten-year-old boy called David Douglas, son of a hardworking Scottish stonemason; a boy who wanted more than anything else to be a gardener.

Wee David got his wish, and at 20 was foreman in Glasgow's Botanical Gardens, arousing the professional interest of the University's regius professor of botany, the famed William Jackson Hooker. Hooker figured the husky Highland youth would make an ideal collector for London's Royal Horticultural Society.

Collectors, by the way, do more than pot plants or press them in a book. Frequently they run the risk of being drowned or breaking their necks, not to speak of being killed by jungle animals.

The Society took young Douglas on Hooker's recommendation and assigned him to the Atlantic coast of the United States for a four month collecting trip, and he returned with an extraordinary variety of shrubs, plants and trees hitherto unknown in Europe. He was fortunate, of course, to meet Coxe, the famous orchardist (Coxe's Orange Pippin) who loaded him down with 21 new varieties of peaches and 10 new varieties of apples, types unknown across the Atlantic.

It was while Douglas was in New England that he spotted a strange plant; the Oregon grape. Enquiring where it came from he was told that Clarke and Lewis had brought it back from the Columbia River in 1805. Right away Douglas was fired with the lure of the far west, and back home he persuaded the society to send him to Oregon, which at the time meant anything between Alaska and the Sacramento river.

ROUNDING THE HORN in the ship William and Anne in 1824, off the coast of Chile they touched at lonely Juan Fernandez Island. It was here, 250 years ago, that another Scot, a sailor called Alexander Selkirk, spent four-and-a-half years in lonely, self-imposed exile because he couldn't get along with his skipper. Selkirk's experience prompted author Daniel Defoe to write "Robinson Crusoe." By queer coincidence when the William and Anne put in to Juan Fernandez, they found another marooned sailor, William Clark, awaiting rescue. Or at least Douglas found him as he wandered over the island looking for plant specimens. Clark, his beard and hair long and matted, his clothing in rags, said he'd been five years on the island, living in a primitive shelter, his only utensil a single iron pot.

Douglas arrived on the Columbia River in April, 1825, and first thing that caught his interest was the flattened heads of the Chinook Indians. His curiosity nearly cost him his life when enraged tribesmen caught him digging up three of the queer shaped skulls from an Indian burial ground. However, he got them safely to the British Museum where they can be seen today.

A century and a quarter ago Washington, Oregon and California were wilderness, but Douglas in his roaming, by horse, canoe and on foot, racked up an extraordinary record of mileage, as he collected around 500 specimens. Some, of course, were already known, but the majority were new to Europe's botanists, specimens that ranged from the California poppy to the giant fir that bears his name. He also discovered Sitka spruce and half a dozen valuable pines. It has been said that the fame of one plant alone repaid the entire cost of the expedition; the plant was the flowering currant, common today on most of our island roadsides.

It would have taken a rugged constitution to keep pace with Douglas in his travels. Clad in simple deerskin jacket and trousers, the moccasined feet of the fairlhaired young Scot took him tirelessly along forest trails and over mountains, carrying only the barest necessities. He lived,

David McH. Forbes, of the Hilo Burns Club, examines the inscriptions on the Douglas Memorial on the spot where the world-famous botanist was killed. The monument is surrounded by a thick stand of Douglas fir, planted in honor of the intrepid collector.

when he could, by his rifle; if no game crossed his path he went hungry, and often wet and without fire in the bargain. Mostly he travelled alone, except for his faithful little terrier, 'Billy'.

Once, he related, roasting a grouse over a camp fire he fell into a deep sleep of exhaustion and woke to find the grouse burned in the embers.

He noticed among other things that the whole coast lay under a heavy pall of smoke every summer when Indians set fire to the forests; they knew the burned over ground yielded blackberries, deer and grouse, which were much more valuable than trees.

ONCE ON A TRIP to the coast, wrote Douglas, he and his Indian helpers dragged their dug out canoe four miles over rocks, stumps and gullies in thick fog and rain; when they got to tide water they faced high winds, rain, sleet and hail. Subsisting for two days on berries and roots, the third day Douglas walked 16 miles between 4 a.m. and 6 p.m., but the next day he was so exhausted he could only lie shivering in a bark lean-to. After that they shot some ducks and ate them raw.

This sort of privation left its mark, for at 30 people mistook Douglas for 50. His travels took him high over the slopes of the Cascade Mountains (where he slept in wet clothing in 26 degree temperature) and a month later he was travelling the Snake River in temperatures well over 100. Often he was confronted on the trail by painted Indian braves, who had never seen a white man before; men who fingered their bows and arrows with hostile looks. Somehow or another Douglas always managed to talk them into a friendly mood, or took their minds off the warpath with feats of strength or marksmanship.

Once attacked by three grizzly bears he shot two of them in quick order. Another time crossing the Umpqua River his horse fell between two giant logs, and he spent back breaking hours axing his way through one tree to release the animal.

In his first year of Oregon exploration he covered 2,000 miles, the next year 4,000 and by the third year his travels added up to an incredible 10,000 miles! Which included the return journey to England the hard way . . . by walking overland from the Columbia River to Hudson's Bay to catch a ship. He not only packed with him a prize collection of Pacific coast plants, but also a couple of live eagles. To his disappointment they died just when he reached his vessel.

HE ARRIVED BACK in England to find himself famous, and small speciments of his Douglas fir being auctioned off for $100 apiece.

Some of them are giants today, in London's Kew Gardens. Lionized and feted, made member of half a dozen world famous societies, winner of botany's famed Copley medal, still Douglas couldn't keep his mind off the foaming rivers, the snowy peaks and giant forests of the Pacific northwest. Back he came to the coast in 1830, on the Hudson's Bay brig Eagle, which touched at Hawaii on the way. It was a spot that fascinated him, and he vowed to go there next.

On the Columbia he covered a lot of his old ground, visited southern California and in 19 months was ready to leave again. This time he planned on returning to England by way of northern B.C. and Alaska, crossing Bering Strait, then walking across Russia.

It was in March, 1833, that he set off, trudging up through the Okanagan to strike the Fraser river, then the Nechacko and finally the Stuart River until he found himself at Fort St. James on Stuart Lake. His eyesight started to fail (prob-